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Winchester Hospital updates labor and delivery unit

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Winchester Hospital is updating its Labor & Delivery Unit to provide a more comfortable experience for patients and staff. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

A new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites that about 3.6 million babies were born in the U.S. in 2024. It may see a lot, but the birthrate in the country has been on the decline for de

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In Massachusetts, there's been a steady decline since 2017, with only 67,851 births in 2024, according to Massachusetts Maternal & Infant Health Data.

But at Winchester Hospital, the labor and delivery staff have seen an increase in the number of patients coming to their facility. In fact, the hospital estimates it delivers about 2,600 babies a year.

Cheryl Bauer, ACNO Maternal Child Health Services, left, Ellen Hamilton and Elinor Brown, MD, OB/GYN look at a patient chart. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

Ellen Hamilton was born at Winchester Hospital in 1974, one of 980 babies born that year. As nurse manager of the postpartum unit, mother/baby special care nursery and lactation services, Hamilton said last year Winchester delivered 2,525 babies, way more than 50 years ago.

"It is an increase for us," Hamilton said. "Of course, somewhere like Brigham & Women's will deliver 21,000 babies a year. For a community hospital, though, that's a good number."

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That's one reason why the hospital's Labor & Delivery Unit is receiving a facelift. Hamilton said the Cummings Foundation donated $2.5 million for the unit to be named after Dr. Peter Rotolo, a long-time obstetrician who died last February.

Wall coverings, bathrooms, wallpaper and floors are all being changed over, as well as the nurse's station. A new hydrotherapy tub has also been replaced for women who want to labor in warm water, which Hamilton said, can relieve pain and discomfort.

Winchester Hospital does not do water births, however.

The new birthing tub in the Winchester Hospital Labor & Delivery Unit. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

Hamilton said the labor tub isn't used often, but patients can ask for it during their labor.

The project is expected to be finished by October and Hamilton said it's about half way done, with about five patient rooms, the doctor's lounge, supply area and nurse's station already finished.

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“It’s very exciting,” Hamilton said. “Some of our patients who have been here before have noticed the difference. And, of course, the staff has noticed the difference. Everything is fresher and brighter.”

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Mary Roddy has been a nurse in the unit for about 38 years. She’s definitely noticed the difference.

“It’s still in the process, but when it’s finished it will be absolutely wonderful,” she said. “It’s fantastic, a great improvement.”

Community services

Why is Winchester seeing more women delivering at its hospital? Hamilton said one reason is simply that patients see the convenience of being so close to home.

“We pride ourselves in our patient care,” she said. “If you’re having a run-of-the-mill pregnancy, this is the place to be. We do it great, we take care of our patients.”

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Labor and delivery nurse Marry Roddy speaks with a patient. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

Yes, a lot of people think Boston is the place to be to deliver, but Hamilton and Roddy both said many have realized their community hospital offers just as good care as in the city.

“City hospitals are fabulous for high-risk patients,” Roddy said. “Winchester offers a great opportunity to deliver in your own community. We often seen patients who come back to deliver their second or even fourth babies.”

She added the hospital offers great resources for new parents, including breastfeeding help or pediatric services.

Roddy said a lot has changed since she started in Winchester nearly four decades ago.

“When I first started here there were about 10 OBs compared to today,” she said. “We have a much bigger delivery rate now.”

She added many new parents-to-be come in with birth plans, the and prepare for their birth experience. There are also choices, such as

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doulas, or even how to deliver.

“A lot of times moms come in and hope for a natural child birth,” Roddy said. “And some can go without an epidural, but we remind them that it’s an individual situation. In the end, we want a mom and baby who are well. We take it hour by hour.”

Roddy said most people who come in go with the flow.

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A doctor welcomes a new life to the world at Winchester Hospital. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

In talking with Roddy, you might notice her Irish brogue. She is indeed from Ireland, where she trained as a nurse in Northern Ireland and also in Scotland.

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"In 1987, I came to America and Winchester was the only hospital looking for labor and delivery nurses," she said. "It was an excellent choice for me."

In a world with more testing, more ultrasounds, better educated patients, Roddy said the world of labor and delivery has changed for the better. Problems, she added, can be found earlier and that leads to better outcomes for mothers and babies.

Most of all, Roddy loves what she does and she added she wouldn't want to do anything else, anywhere else.

"I love labor and delivery," she said. "It's a wonderful day, a big change for people and I really love it. Yes, there are days when there's a very sad outcome for our patients and I see both ends of that. But it's more happy than sad and I focus on the happiness of it."

Birthrates nationwide may be on the decline, but Winchester is seeing more and more patients coming in. Here are some of the more than 107,000 who have been born at the hospital. COURTESY PHOTOS/WINCHESTER HOSPITAL

With more than 107,000 babies delivered at the hospital since its unit has been in operation, the hospital's future is bright.

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"Our goal is to take care of our patients and babies and send them home to their new life," Hamilton said. "Our patients are with us 24 hours and we supply them with a lot of resources. The population may be decreasing, but at Winchester, it's increasing!"

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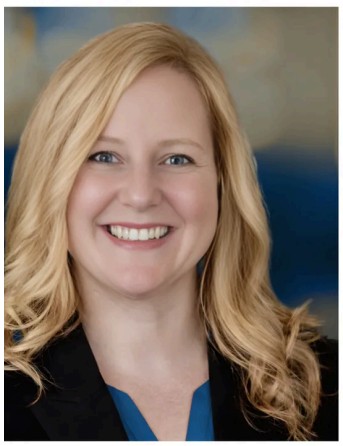

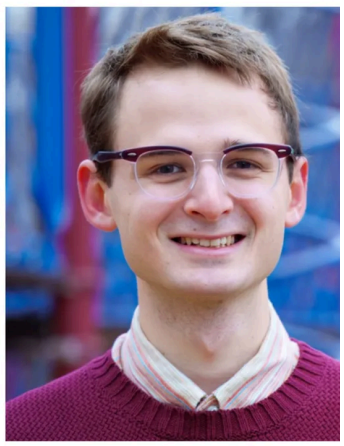

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'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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